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Gift Cards – Here To Stay Or On The Way Out?

Author: Shopkeeper | Category: Gift Cards

by Mark Askew

The National Retail Federation anticipated \$17.24 billion worth of holiday sales last year in gift cards. The reasons gift cards are so frequently bought in place of other items are numerous. No one wants to give a gift that is not appreciated. In addition, who wants to burden down an aging relative with having to drive several miles to a store she never shops in order to exchange the gift.

Folks once thought that with a gift card you couldn't go wrong trying to please. And this seemed logical at the time. Thus as gift cards gained popularity, many merchants jumped on the bandwagon. It is true that there is very little need to guess at what the recipient wants but are all gift card recipients pleased? For instance, what if you give a gift card from a sporting goods store to someone who's not into sports? Or a gift to shop a jewelry store to someone who lives too great a distance from the store to even bother to shop there.

On a positive note 60 percent of gift card issuers, offer the potential to obtain a replacement card, with the remaining balance, if the original is lost or stolen. But getting a replacement may require the original receipt and the card number. Some companies may accept other proof of purchase. The gift card recipient would have to have all the papers to obtain a replacement. No wonder a significant percentage of gift cards have gone unredeemed. That said, when buying a gift card, look carefully at the pre-purchase disclosures of terms and conditions on the web site and the packaging in the store. If terms are not given or appear too cryptic to be complete don't buy.

So when a recipient receives a card from a store they don't like obviously the card just sits in a dresser drawer until its long past the expiration date? Are merchants pocketing the cash while the gift card purchasers just throw away money? That was once the case. But companies like Sears announced it is eliminating expiration dates from all gift cards issued beginning December 17, 2003. Other card issuers have been quickly following suit.

In addition to less expiration date worries there are now a hand full of companies dedicated to redeeming major retail gift cards for recipients of unwanted, unredeemed gift cards. One site, giftcards.com, offers gift card ordering. Many of these companies offer services for such card

issuers as Best Buy, Starbucks and Outback SteakHouse. Still with all the recent changes in favor of the recipient losing the impersonal commercial stigma associated with gift cards has been a challenge.

Some gift card websites have gone to great length to overcome this obstacle. Now you can download your own images and add your own text to create a custom card. Embossed text gives the card that engraved look, a very personal touch.

With all the work to personalize a gift card they still seem to need help to stand out in the crowd of greeting cards and gift bags. After all a gift card is four times smaller than a simple greeting card and weighs only a few ounces. Gift cards just don't have what it takes to stand out among large presents. Some sites compensate for this by upping the value of gift cards. Some card's values far outweigh any large, dominating boxed gift, from \$25 to \$300 or more. With the advent of prepaid debit gift cards from VISA, MasterCard, American Express and DiscoverCard, folks can give a gift card valued at as much as \$3000 dollars depending on the provider. Perhaps big things do come in small packages.

With all the attention gift cards have been given these past few years it would seem they are here to stay. Just make sure you can find them once you've put them away. And above all exchange or redeem the non-debit kind.

Mark Askew is founder of Fimarks business marketing and sales with products and services including greeting cards, family reunion planning tools and greeting cards with gift card sleeves found at <http://www.greetingcards.fimark.net/>

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A Gift Everyone Will Love

Author: Shopkeeper | Category: Gift Cards

The other day I was out shopping for a birthday gift for a colleague's son. I love to shop around and was very sure that I would find something that would be useful for the kid. After all there are so many things that kids like: toys, games, books and electronics. The shops are full of stuff and all it takes is to think up of something, anything: I've never met a kid who didn't like a present. They always do...Well, not always.

First of all deciding what to buy was a major task. There were so many things in stores and I could not make up my mind. Everything looked good to me: the moment I zeroed in on one toy, it was either too expensive or I had doubts if it was the right thing to buy for a kid his age. Spending three hours in toy shops is not my idea of a good shopping trip, so I gave up and I went along with what the sales girl suggested and bought a video game that she suggested was very popular with kids.

Certain that the shop assistant couldn't be wrong I got it gift wrapped and delivered it on the occasion. It was only three days after the event that I got a phone call and was quite alarmed. The parents of the child wanted to know where I bought the video game as they wanted to return it. Sensing that there was something wrong I enquired what the problem was. To my embarrassment, the game proved to be highly violent and incredibly unsuitable. Both my colleague and her husband were aware that their child's grades were slipping, and a computer game may make them slip more. If this was not enough, three other people had given the kid the same so called popular video game.

Finding gifts, even for children can be problematic I like to be sure that the gift will be liked and that the gift fits the person's age and interests.

Sometimes you can take the person along while shopping a gift for him/her, but this is uncommon. Finding a gift that the person likes is hard, and no matter who you will always doubt that they will like it, unless of course you let the person buy their own gift. A gift card is a fabulous idea. It is one gift that will truly fit everyone. One source for gift cards is at giftcards.com. One can buy a card of any value between \$20 and \$500. They even have "Clearance" deals for stores such as "The Gap" or "Bath and Body Works."

Comment:

Gift cards are a great alternative when you are shopping for that impossible person. Gift cards are also a really convenient way to get a gift to someone far away. But be careful, there are some areas where you need to be cautious. More on that later.

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Hello Shoppers!

Author: Shopkeeper | Category: 24 Hour Shops

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